

Important information for UCU Members at Warwick University

Your union on campus

October 2014

Life Sciences: The axe is raised

The University has finally set the price of management failings in Life Sciences in the four years since its inception: the careers of up to 16 members of its academic staff. The announcement that redundancies will be based on the generation of an average of £75k per year per individual (or alternatively £150k pa as Co-I) from research grants over the four years means that our prediction in the August newsletter was very close to the mark.

The UCU will never agree to compulsory redundancies but the application of such a crude metric makes this decision particularly egregious. There is clearly no need for redundancies in a university with a healthy surplus and in a department where recruitment continues, so it is hard not to see this as a blatant example of collective performance management retrospectively applied.

The union has issued a press statement highlighting the very serious issues that this raises (see below), but we are under no illusions about what this action portends. Plans are already afoot for cuts in the Warwick Medical School and there is no reason to believe that, once established, this will not become standard practice when departments fall short of the hopelessly optimistic targets they are all too often encouraged to set. In fact, if the current trend towards investment in bricks and mortar at the expense of academic posts continues, there may eventually be no academic staff left to inflict wear and tear on the buildings.

UCU Position

The union has made the following points in response to the University's actions:

- There is not a redundancy situation in the usual sense. Redundancy means posts are no longer needed. But these cuts will be made by the – retrospective – application of a single mechanical performance metric: an average of £75k per year per member of staff in research grants awarded over the past four years (or alternatively £150k pa as Co-I). We regard this as collective performance management not supported by job descriptions rather than redundancy.
- The university of Warwick has a healthy surplus.
- SLS has been badly mismanaged in the four years since its creation. The university senior management must take responsibility for appointing the head of department responsible for this shambles.
- Staff should not be made to pay with their careers for management failings.
- The expectation that staff raise a fixed amount of external funding as individuals as a condition of employment in an academic role is a wholly new requirement that threatens academics not only in SLS but in all departments across the university.
- A policy of requiring staff to conform, individually, to arbitrary metrics, is unjust, undermines the idea of a university as a community, making academic work risky without the reward to go with the risk. Many able graduate students are increasingly thinking twice about an academic career. This will do long term damage to universities in the UK which are among the best in the world.
- The dismissal of academic staff who are engaged in teaching in the middle of the academic year will do immense harm to the student experience, shows a disregard for the interests of students and will damage the reputation of Warwick university.
- The departmental deficit in SLS against plans is the result of overoptimistic, unrealisable targets and very large payments for central services including bloated administration, spending on non-academic priorities and campus capital developments.

It's not discriminatory but...

Disingenuous

One of our committee members took up the cudgels on behalf of female colleagues when she pressed the university on the issue of costs to them of the new car parking arrangements. Lara McCarthy's enquiry was passed to HR who provided the Equality Impact Assessment she had repeatedly requested and reassured her that 'the scheme itself doesn't disadvantage women with caring responsibilities'.

The response was accurate, but only in a world where no woman with caring responsibilities works part time and has made it to a higher grade. Here is the relevant extract:

Equality Impact Assessment – Workplace Car Parking

'The scheme rules may adversely affect a proportion of the female population that uses Workplace Car Parking. Around 2.5% females (nearly 1.5% of the overall car park users) are likely to pay around 23% more for their car park (18% more than the majority). This affects females in higher grades (8-9) who work part time.

Over 3.5% of the female population and nearly 8% of male population are likely to pay 11% less for their car park than last year (16% less than majority of the other users).'

Nicely balanced then...

It's not discriminatory but...

Dismal

One of the main issues surrounding the state of the economics discipline is the low number of women in senior positions within universities, something the Royal Economic Society has recognised as a serious problem and is working hard to address. Warwick however has just announced the restructuring of its economics research into five groupings, to which all academic staff belong. The ten convenors and deputy convenors appointed to head these groups all are men despite protests from colleagues, both women and men.

UCU welcomes promotion changes

Management has been consulting with the union on proposed changes to promotion procedures within the university. While the new system may not be perfect, it is clear that a good deal of careful thought has gone into it and it represents a significant advance on current arrangements.

The UCU has concerns about the proposed probation procedures, arrangements for recommendations for promotion, differences between university and departmental arrangements and ambiguity in the arrangements relating to a 6th year following probation. However, it is particularly heartening to see that if the proposed changes are approved there will be a clear promotion pathway from teaching only or research only posts to Associate Professor. We applaud this decision by the University and look forward to similar forward-thinking changes in the future.

You don't need to face it alone

If you're facing problems associated with your employment at Warwick and are a UCU member, you can rely on our help. We have a team of personal caseworkers, all volunteers, who are trained to provide support, advice and representation on a range of issues from contract renewal to potential disciplinary action or harassment. If you are being disciplined, or taking a grievance against another member of staff, you have a legal right to be accompanied by a union representative.

If you find yourself in this situation and would like to speak, in confidence, to one of our caseworkers, email our administrator, Claire Duffy at administrator@warwickucu.org.uk

Join your union online at: www.ucu.org.uk/join

Warwick colleague exposes false figures from USS employers

A central plank of the case advanced by university employers for making changes to USS pensions is that we are all living longer in retirement, but Jane Hutton, professor of statistics at Warwick, has forced them to withdraw false life expectancy figures posted on their website.

Anyone consulting the Q&A webpage of the Employers Pensions Forum before Jane's intervention would have read the following in response to Question 9 ('What are the issues with longevity and will they really impact on USS?'):

'Current longevity patterns are significantly different to those when the scheme was set up in 1974. Then it was expected that a USS pensioner retiring at age 65 would live for 6 to 8 years in retirement so the cost of the scheme and the contribution rates were set on this basis. By 2014 the anticipated length of retirement is around 30 years...'

The change involved is breathtaking. According to these figures, in 1974 your life expectancy would have been only half (49%) that of the general public, but this year it is 1.4 to 1.6 times greater. To get things into perspective, the Office of National Statistics has an increase of 1.3 to 2.3 years for each decade over the 40 years since 1974 while the Employers Pensions Forum has an increase of 5.8 years!

Jane picked up on this and wrote to the Forum pointing out that the figures are barely credible and would require us to believe not only that the eminent Chairman of the International Association of Consulting Actuaries, who was directly involved when the USS was set up in 1974, had grossly underestimated life expectancy at that time, but also that the rapidly rising life expectancy in subsequent years had been ignored. She informed the Forum that she would be requesting the relevant information from the USS actuary.

Although Jane did not receive even the courtesy of an acknowledgement from the Forum, the numbers mysteriously disappeared from its website, leaving only the following:

'Yes, longevity issues do impact on USS as they do on all defined benefit pension schemes. This is one reason why the costs of defined benefits pensions schemes have been increasing.'

The only evidence of the original posting is the copy Jane had printed out. Compare [the original version of the webpage as it had been](#) and the new version [here](#). Read what Jane herself [wrote](#) to the Employers Pension Forum.

Join us

In its treatment of colleagues in Life Sciences, the University has made it very clear that it is prepared to act retrospectively to make staff redundant if it suits its purpose. This means YOUR JOB IS NO LONGER SECURE. It has never been more important to enjoy the protection that union membership offers. The UCU has members, full- and part-time, from all areas of the university, including academics, researchers, administrators and librarians. Joining couldn't be simpler: just go to joinonline.ucu.org.uk to and follow a few short steps. It could make a big difference to your future.

Don't miss the next Branch Meeting
Details to follow by email

Join your union online at: www.ucu.org.uk/join

Action on pensions

As this newsletter goes out, voting in the UCU ballot on industrial action is closing and we move to the next phase of the fight to defend our pensions. The Warwick branch has already been active in responding to this threat to the future financial security of its members and has proposed motions for a forthcoming special conference. It is also requesting a special meeting of the University Assembly to consider a motion on pensions. Developments on the latter will feature in the next newsletter, but in the meantime we include details of the conference motions below.

The Warwick UCU general meeting in September unanimously agreed that the following motions be put before a special conference of pre-1992 universities:

Motion 1

Defend USS and the Principle of Collectivist Pensions (proposed by Dennis Leech, seconded by Lara McCarthy)

Conference believes:

- Problems of USS are essentially political and not unique to the scheme.
- Reported funding deficit is theoretical not a real cash flow. In cash flow terms USS appears solvent.
- Regulation is based on neoliberal philosophy of privatisation whose ideal is replacing collectivist DB [Defined Benefit] pensions with individual responsibility for retirement (DC [Defined Contribution] at best).

- Imposing rigorous funding rules on underfunded schemes makes members pay twice.
- Resulting closure of DB schemes means an impending elderly poverty crisis.

Conference instructs HEC to:

- Demand USS board provide clear cash-based accounts.
- Co-ordinate a campaign of protests by members and branches to pressure the Trustees to accept more realistic assumptions for the valuation of USS, including lobbying Board meetings on September 24 and November 20.
- As the largest private DB scheme, campaign politically with TUs, political parties and others, for legislative reform to restore collective pensions.

Motion 2

Intergenerational Fairness (proposed by Laura Schwarz, seconded by Nick Lawrence)

Conference instructs HEC to:

- Foreground intergenerational fairness in negotiations with USS.
- Make clear in publicity to members that proposed changes will have a detrimental impact on **all** members. Both in terms of their existing pension and in making it easier to attack conditions on all pensions in the future.

Do you have a story to tell?

We aim to send out this newsletter once a month, around the middle of the month, and want all members to feel that they have a stake in it. If you think you have a story to tell, some interesting news, an idea for an item or perhaps a suggestion for something that would be worth following up, please get in touch with us at: administrator@warwickucu.org.uk

Please ensure that you mark your email NEWSLETTER.

COMING UP: Following up on our exposure of the gender imbalance in appointments in the Department of Economics, the next newsletter will include an insider's view of the situation.